

each blow like she had radar. Ruth pulled up and skidded to a stop at the sight of Clete and Juanita's Ford Granada doing a tire-screeching, door-flinging stop at the curb. Ginger leaped into the cab and Juanita leaped out. "What the hell kind of a baby-sitter are you, anyway?" she said, advancing on Ruth with her fists balled up and her jaws clenched tight.

Ruth shook the cleaver under her neighbor's nose and said, "The kind who almost lost a week's worth of meat to that mangy little mutt of yours." Juanita sprang at her. Ruth swung the cleaver. Juanita caught her wrist and they clinched and wrestled, like two vicious, dancing, muu muu clad hippos, while Clete got the bags from the trunk and carried them inside and Ginger sneaked by them, heading back toward that ham.

## TUNA

The aroma of Juanita's tuna casserole wafted out the windows and the screen door, drawing every cat in a half-mile radius. They gathered on the front porch and back fence rails, caterwauling horribly.

Clete slipped out the sliding glass door with his pistol and started blasting away, blowing splintery holes in his fence.

The cats disappeared.

Juanita lifted her casserole from the oven and set it on a hot pad on the dining room table. She stuck a serving spoon in the middle of the steaming dish and left it to cool. It set and hardened like a bowl of concrete. When she tried to serve it, she couldn't get the spoon out, so she threw a frozen pizza in the oven and turned on the T.V.

Clete set the casserole bowl on a makeshift plywood pedestal in the front yard and challenged all comers to make an attempt at removing the spoon. The neighborhood men abandoned their weed whips and lawn mowers and lined up for their turns. They pulled and strained unsuccessfully, and the cats hung around the corners of the house and under the cars on the street and driveway, waiting.

Somebody asked what the prize was for the removal of the spoon. Clete opened a beer, took a long pull, wiped his mouth on his sleeve, and said, "A date with the chef."



An uneasy silence fell on the crowd as they shifted and eyed each other.

Ellis, the next door neighbor said, "You mean Juanita."

Clete belched and said, "Right, Juanita."

The men vanished like the cats had earlier, and the cats emerged from their hiding places, slinking toward the bowl, stopping on their journey to silently sniff the air.

#### RUTH LEAHY'S SORE BOTTOM

Ruth was hand watering some dry spots on the front lawn when Ranger, the pit bull from up the street, kept by his owners for protection for their hundred thousand dollar indoor marijuana garden, wandered by and decided to attack. He slunk around silently behind her and clamped his powerful jaws deep into the abundant flesh of her left buttock, then lurched backwards, dragging his howling prey across the yard.

Ellis was inside admiring the set of used golf clubs and their cracked vinyl bag that he'd bought at the Disabled American Veterans' Thrift Store. He looked out the screen door when he heard his wife's screams and saw her being dragged backwards across the lawn by the pit bull belonging to the druggies up the street. So he grabbed a rusty five iron and dashed outside, and then he dashed the dull, evil, inbred brain of the pit bull all over the driveway.

Ruth had to lie out flat on her stomach on the bed of Ellis' pick-up truck for the ride to the hospital. She got ninety-five stitches and a referral to a good plastic surgeon.

When they arrived home, Ranger was still in their driveway with his crushed skull, curled into a fetal position and stiffened like a ninety-pound rock by rigor mortis. Ruth slid oh so slowly and carefully out of the truck's bed and picked him up, cradled in her arms like a large, ugly baby. She limped up the sidewalk, trailing blood and brain tissue from one end of her load and stinking brown lava from the other, with her husband Ellis tripping back and forth behind her, trying to talk her out of doing anything foolish.

When they arrived at the house with the unkept lawn and the torn screen door, Ellis had given up on trying to get his wife to drop the dog and come back home. He ran